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ABSTRACT

The search for presuppositions of a people's thought is not new. Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos have both attempted to describe the assumptions underlying the Mexican character. Paz described Mexicans as private, defensive, and stoic, characteristics taken to the extreme in the "pachuco." Ramos, on the other hand, described Mexicans as being distrustful and having feelings of inferiority, characteristics taken to the extreme in the "pelado." Literature also provides preconceptions about Mexican Americans. The Chicano literature of the 1960's and 1970's often calls for voluntary submission to the assumptions and concepts of "la raza" and of "carnalismo," or allegiance. The works of E. C. Orozco, Rodolfo Gonzales, Henry B. Gonzales, and Armando Rodriguez, among others, attempt to define a Chicano nationalism, Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and Chicano goals. Examination reveals that Mexican American literature had a predominant theme that: (1) organized deprivation and perceived oppression into complaint, emotional appeal, and protest; and (2) stressed the cultural heritage of Mexican Americans; and (3) based its acceptance on assumptions of ethnic pluralism. However, the Chicano movement has changed; protest is no longer essential. As part of a shift toward moral relativism in the larger society, the Chicano movement has lost meaning and the sense of a religious view of life. Mexican Americans should determine the meaning and cost of freedom. (SB)

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Mexican-American Cultural Assumptions and Implications

by

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"It is a strange desire,
to seek power, and
to lose liberty."

-Francis Bacon

Patrick Romanell, has told us in Making of the Mexican Mind that,

> "If social inquiry is to resolve our intercultural problems on a theoretical plane, it must trace them back to their psychological roots before men of action can be expected to cope with them intelligently."[1]

The "tracing" Romanell refers to constitutes two-dimensional inquiry into a people's thought by means of two fundamental questions:

1. What are the assumptions, presuppositions, or preconceptions, or, more general still, attitudes of life that underlie the different conceptions or ideals of a people?
2. How do a people's presuppositions or preconceptions of life serve as a general response to their environment, both physical and spiritual?

While these questions do not spell out precise methods for inquiry, they do suggest an approach to complex interactions between the thought and behavior

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of a people. A propos this relation, an ancient proverb claims that as a man thinketh, so is he![2] Francis Schaeffer has recognized the significance of presuppositions throughout his many works.

> "People have presuppositions, and they will live more consistently on the basis of these presuppositions than even they themselves may realize . . . . People's presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide a basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions."[3]

To illustrate and reinforce the truth of these remarks, allow me to quote one of my favorite parables on assumptions and the implications that follow.

> "Once upon a time there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to a friendly neighborhood psychiatrist. The psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his belief that he was dead. The fact the psychiatrist settled on was the simple truth that dead men do not bleed, and he put the patient to work reading medical texts, observing autopsies, etc. After weeks of effort the patient finally said, 'All right, all right! You've convinced me. Dead men do not bleed.' Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him in the arm with a needle and the blood flowed. The man looked with a contorted ashen face and cried: 'Good Lord! Dead men bleed after all.'"[4]

This parable illustrates a couple of perhaps not so obvious points:

1. There are sound and unsound assumptions. With sound presuppositions, facts will make a difference, i.e., will count in one's assessment

of reality.

2. If you hold to unsound presuppositions with sufficient tenacity, then, you will probably create a world of your own totally unrelated to reality and very probably incapable of being touched by it.

"As a man thinketh, so is he." That thought which became language during the heyday of the Chicano "liberation movement" is the subject of my inquiry. Did the language--the literature--reveal the assumptions or the presuppositions? What were their implications? To learn of it I shall sample the language of values, beliefs, and hopes associated with talk about Mexican American or Chicano liberation as these qualities of language reflect qualities of life.

The division will be along three lines. In Part I, we shall see that searching for the presuppositions of a people's thought as a basis for understanding cultural stresses, tensions, idiosyncrasies, conflicts and the like is not a bit new. The task of searching for a people's world view assumptions has been undertaken by many. Part II constitutes an inquiry, neither definitive nor comprehensive, into Mexican American thought about liberation as mirrored in recent literature authored by Mexican Americans. Part III will suggest some implications.

Part I Establishing a Frame of Reference

As noted above, the search for the presuppositions of a people's thought has been bravely and honorably undertaken by a number of scholars.

For example, a portion from The Shaping of America by the philosopher-theologian John Warwick Montgomery captures for us profiles of national character by writers around the globe.

"In spite of the unavoidable employment of deductive and inductive inference by all thinking men, the Eastern peoples do in fact move in an ideological climate which differs profoundly from that of the West . . . . /Hajime/ Nakamura isolates such identifiers of Indian thought as the following: preference for the negative, minimizing individuality and specific particulars, subjective comprehension of personality, subservience to universals, alienation from the objective natural world, and a focus on introspection. Similarly, readers of Lafcadio Hearn's Japan: An Interpretation . . . will agree that the Japanese world-view embraces in a peculiar way elements of formalism, paradox, becoming as opposed to being, incompleteness--in a word, the profound conviction that there is 'no reality except that which concerns the working of our own minds.'"[5]

With penetrating skill, Montgomery summarizes Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards by Salvador de Madriaga, former Professor of Spanish Studies at Oxford:

"He found the key to English character in the notion of 'fair play,' the understanding of the French mind in the concept of 'le droit' (right, law), and the secret of the Spanish personality in 'el honor,' thereby effectively classifying these peoples on the basis of their central preoccupations with, respectively, action, thought, and passion."[6]

Nor has the Italian national character escaped the analytic search for the central preoccupations of a people.

"Luigi Barzini's The Italians is another illustration of the validity of studies of the national character of particular Western nations; he puts under his microscope 'the Italian way of life which makes all laws and

institutions function defectively,' and shows how that life-style is 'the illusion of a solution, lotus-eating, the resigned acceptance of the very evils man has tried to defeat, the art of decorating, ennobling them, calling them by different names and living with them.'"[7]

Moving closer to home, two additional examples will suffice to round out our frame of reference. The first is found in Octavio Paz's, The Labyrinth of Solitude, and the second in Samuel Ramos' Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico. Ramos' descriptions of the Mexican character are striking, but Paz's are no less telling:

"The Mexican . . . seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself: his face is a mask and so is his smile. In his harsh solitude, which is both barbed and courteous, everything serves him as a defense: silence and words, politeness and disdain, irony and resignation. He is jealous of his own privacy and that of others, and he is afraid even to glance at his neighbor, because a mere glance can trigger the rage of these electrically charged spirits. He passes through life like a man who has been flayed; everything can hurt him, including words and the very suspicion of words. His language is full of reticences, of metaphors and allusions, of unfinished phrases, while his silence is full of tints, folds, thunderheads, sudden rainbows, indecipherable threats."[8]

According to Paz, these characteristics are symptomatic of, among other things, a heremeticism--a predilection to enclose oneself in an invulnerability to every other and every attempt to self-disclosure. Taken to an extreme, one encounters Paz's conception of the pachuco as sheer negation who, in rejecting his Mexican origins, acts like a person wearing a disguise, afraid of the stranger's look lest it strip him and leave him naked--"defenseless against

the stares of everyone."[9] And elsewhere Paz concludes that the pachuco's whole being "is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma," who in neither wanting to become Mexican again, nor assimilating to North American society enters a labyrinth of solitude uniquely his own.[10]

As a price for this barricade of indifference and remoteness, "relationships with other men are always tinged with suspicion" for the Mexican. Men who submit, backdown, or open themselves are, among other things, weak, cowards, or inferior. Women are inferior, on this view, "because, in submitting, they open themselves up. Their inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex, their submissiveness, which is a wound that never heals." To confide in others is to sell oneself, is to crack, is to allow the other entrance into one's fort. Distance between persons is the source of mutual respect and mutual security. Familiarity not only breeds contempt, but in violating one's privacy--self-contempt![11]

Thus, the Mexican perceives life as a type of combat that emphasizes defensiveness and a readiness to repel any attempt to enter the hermeticism with which he encloses himself. Manliness and stoicism are united as attributes of the macho. Suffering and danger merit no more than indifference. Defeat is to be accepted with dignity. To be resigned to one's fate, to suffer in patience, with fortitude, in the face of adversity, and even death itself, this, according to Paz, is admired and praised "more than the most brilliant triumph."[12]

In citying portions of Paz's masterful attempt to delineate the underlying assumptions of the national character of the Mexican, we see a recent effort to describe the set of assumptions that collectively constitute the Mexican world view.

Paz was not unaware of the dangers of reducing diversity and mulitipli-

city to sweeping generalization. Even where one may succeed in achieving a better understanding of a particular people via retroduction,* its value may have temporal limits. Changes in circumstances over the years and a people's response to changes are constant reminders that very little remains fixed for very long. But if, for a particular time and place, one has come close to the mark or approximated a helpful insight into the thought and life of a people, then this indeed has value.

The quest for the underlying oneness took a more explicitly psychological direction for Ramos. In his book, Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico, he sought to establish a theory which would explain "the real character of Mexican man and his culture."[13] The best model for study, according to Ramos, "is the Mexican pelado, for he constitutes the most elemental and clearly defined expression of national character."[14]

> "His name (pelado) defines him accurately. He is a kind of person who continually lays bare his soul, so that its most intimate confines are visible . . . . The pelado belongs to a most vile category of social fauna; he is a form of human rubbish from the great city . . . . Life from every quarter has been hostile to him and his reaction has been black resentment. He is an explosive being with whom relationship is

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*The philosopher Charles Peirce called retroduction "the spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reasoning," i. e., "reasoning from consequent to an antecedent;" it suggests that something may be, but "retroduction does not afford security. The hypothesis must be tested." Deduction, on the other hand, explicates; it suggests something must be. Induction evaluates; it suggests something actually is operative. Charles S. Peirce, Values In a Universe of Chance, edited by Philip P. Weiner, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 368-371.

dangerous, for the slightest friction causes him to blow up."[15]

When these explosions are verbal, Ramos continues, they reiterate his constant theme of self-affirmation in crude and suggestive language. These reactions are the traits, he declares, of one who protests against his real position in life which is in fact, a nullity. This realization, perceived as a disagreeable truth to be suppressed, nevertheless, "strives to the surface of his conscience, but it is impeded by another force which from within the subconscious consistently reduces his sense of personal integrity."[16] The result is a bellicosity in search of support to recover a measure of faith in himself, "but since his support is devoid of all real value, he has to replace it with a fictitious one"--his virility.[17]

Ramos adds that for all this, the pelado succeeds only in showing the weakness he tries to hide. Thus, he lives in distrust of himself, fearful of being discovered. Moreover, his distrust is not confined to himself but embraces all who come close. The very next man he encounters is certain to be his enemy.

Ramos concludes, "the Mexican psyche is the result of reactions that strive to conceal an inferiority complex."[18] Ramos prefaced this conclusion by explaining that his analysis neither assumed nor implied that the "Mexican is inferior, but rather that he feels inferior."[19] Nevertheless, should this be considered insufficient qualification to his thesis and one or another person become offended, Ramos would take that as proof of his thesis.[20]

Thus, the pelado, for Ramos, and the pachuco, for Paz constitute useful extremes and epistemologically vivid models which captured motivating forces of the Mexican character. In other words, the analyses of these extremes captured not only the essential character of the pelado and the pachuco but the whole of Mexican character in a manner that unified a wealth of diversity

of Mexican attitudes and behaviors.

To be sure, the concept of a unified national character can be overdone. Nevertheless, as Montgomery points out, excesses and even abuses of the concept do not invalidate it. All one can realistically require is that in the quest for unity in diversity one avoid two errors:

> "the insistence that there is only unity (to the destruction of all genuine diversity) and a fascination with multiplicity which completely loses sight of the underlying oneness."[21]

Part II Mexican American Preconceptions

Let us now focus on Mexican Americans--on the language of values, beliefs, and hopes associated with talk about Mexican American or Chicano liberation as these qualities of language reflect qualities of life.

The late 1960's and most of the 1970's were years of passion for many Mexican Americans. Men of the day gave voice to decades of past bitter experiences of alienation, racial discrimination and prejudice. In retrospect, these experiences may appear to have been merely issues of the day, spoken by men of the day. But were they much more than mere issues? May I propose that the experiences which Chicanos claimed as a group of being excluded, ignored, exploited, manipulated, or falsely stereotyped were experiences which long since had forged a set of perceptual presuppositions through which reality was encountered?

Chicanos wrote and spoke with indignation and anger. The realization that legally right and morally right were not always in harmony revealed a sense of rectitude operating within the moral dimension of Chicano experience. The realization that prejudice may be "the child of ignorance," but it also "squints when it looks, and lies when it talks" was voiced in a hundred ways.

But to know and voice a wrong is never equal to hating it. To hate a wrong implies conviction and the longing for justice. Given opportunity, these motivating factors drive passion to act, sometimes in reckless abandon unless checked by a vision and hope for a future. Thus experience made bitter by memory and lifted up by hope raised a question about means and ends. What was the basis for judging morally right and wrong action?

The quest recovered an ancient truth for Chicanos--that knowledge of rectitude depends ultimately on submission to the moral realities that bind persons to existence. Whenever and wherever persons chose to deny the existence of these realities and either ignored or refused to acknowledge the implicit ethical decision, the human endeavor for mutual respect and dignity did not succeed. Where it did succeed, persons had accepted the implicit ethical decision. In either case, to submit or not to submit, was voluntary--not coerced by fear or guilt.

The idea of voluntary submission was exemplified in the notion of la raza. The concept of la raza, described by Armando Rendon, is based on the acceptance of the interdependency of persons and personal responsibility for conduct.

> "The concept of raza derives from a belief in the inherent relationship of one man to another, with each man willing to take the initiative, but at the same time insisting on an individual independence. The interdependence of men is another way to look at it, while each man must accept blame or praise for what he does."[22]

The nature of raza interdependence achieves realization in "carnalismo." For Armando Navarro, carnalismo "means a type of brotherhood /operating/ within members of La Raza characterized by depth of feeling and allegiance to

other carnales."[23] Another writer put it this way, "it is a type of feeling and allegiance that many blood relatives have for one another."[24] Carnalismo was also called upon to embody an array of social ideals.

> ". . . carnalismo, is the social dimension and thrust to personal self-awareness and honesty . . . . Carnalismo, roughly translates as fellowship and sharing; brotherhood means that we work alongside our carnales /brothers/ and carnalas /sisters/ as members of familia . . . . We are called to be fully human, fully Chicano, which means that each of us must put his familia, his barrio, his raza, before himself."[25]

It appears that some Mexican American writers were fearful of losing what amounted to principles of brotherhood that posit a set of unifying relations which transcended birthplace, language, or culture.[26]

Orozco, for example, in his book Republican Protestantism in Aztlan, associates the notion of carnalismo with the Christian concepts of brotherhood and love. He believes that the foundations of Mexicanism, as he defines it, exhibit "a lesson in love and carnalismo."[27]

One should also ask, at this point, whether the assumptions of raza and carnalismo imply an ethnocentrism that cart one off to isolation rather than interdependence between persons regardless of cultural or ethnic backgrounds? The answer to this question is mixed, negative in tone and hopeful in aspiration. These assumptions and associated concepts when acted out exhibited a struggle for identity, meaning, purpose, freedom, justice, dignity, and respect.

One well known poetic expression of an attempt to ground in flesh and bone characteristics paradigmatic of La Raza was Rodolfo Gonzales' Yo Soy Joaquin.

Here, the idea of mestisaje or mixture of bloods traced creature to Creator:

"the priests,
both good and bad,
took--
but
gave a lasting truth that
Spaniard
Indian
Mestizo
were all God's children."[28]

And, liberty is an inalienable right branded into the very nature of being human.

"And
from these words grew man
who prayed and fought
for
their own worth as human beings,
for
that
GOLDEN MOMENT
of
FREEDOM."[29]

This freedom, ever threatened by forces of evil, a never ending struggle to retain it, or if lost, to regain it again, is the very foundation for personal value and identity.

"I am Joaquin.

I must fight

and win this struggle

for my sons, and they

must know from me

who I am."[30]

Further, the image of hope is in each, a gift, and . . .

"there is no need

for us to prove our humanity . . .

we fear not treating others with basic human dignity . . .

yet, you quake at the thought

that others might prove to be more human

and dignified . . . . ."[31]

It has been said that "questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.[32] Do you remember the old question, "What do Mexican-Americans want?" Henry B. Gonzales, member of Congress from Texas, in 1969 recorded this response (worth quoting in full):

"What I want is justice. By justice I mean decent work at decent wages for all who want work; decent support for those who cannot support themselves; full and equal opportunity in employment, in education, in schools; I mean by justice the full, fair, and impartial protection of the law for every man; I mean by justice decent homes, adequate streets and public services; and I mean by justice no man being asked to do more than his fair share, but none being expected to do less. In short, I seek a justice that amounts to full, free, and equal opportunity for all; I believe in a justice that does not tolerate evil or evil doing;

and I believe in a justice that is for all the people all the time."[33]

Lest one imagine that Gonzales has the millenium in mind, his rhetoric included a belief "that justice can be obtained by those who know exactly what they seek, and know exactly how they plan to seek it" barring action based on ends justifying means.[34]

Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, mentioned earlier, founder of the Denver based Crusade for Justice (1965), at a symposium on "Chicano Liberation" at Hayward, California in November, 1969 stated the conviction that Chicano Nationalism was the key for liberation. His brand of nationalism as a tool was identified with the desired need for unity in a people.

> "Now what are tools? We said nationalism, which means that we have to be able to identify with our past, and understand our past, in order that we can dedicate ourselves to the future, dedicate ourselves to change and we have to understand what humanism really is. We can tie the cultural thing into it, but we also have to tie in the political and the economic. We tie these things together, and we start to use the common denominator of nationalism."[35]

Armando Rodriguez' response to what was wanted summarizes the preceding remarks succinctly when to the rhetorical question, "Who am I? he wrote,

> "I'm a human being. I have the same hopes that you do, the same fears the same drives, same desires, same concerns, same abilities; and I want the same chance that you have to be an individual . . . . And this freedom means education. And this freedom means a bigger share in the economic and political pot."[36]

Well, this has been just the smallest sampling. Ever so much more was said and written in those days. But what can be inferred from even this small

sample from the literature applies as well, I believe, to the numerous other like reconstructions of reality--such that a couple of generalizations are in order.

1. The predominant theme in a significant portion of the literature organized deprivation, poverty, and perceived oppression into the forms of complaint, lamentation, emotional appeal and protest.
2. The dominant theme stressed the cultural heritage of Mexican Americans basing its acceptance on assumptions of ethnic pluralism and egalitarian principles of Americanism.[37]

Part III Some Implications

Now, since my remarks are based on a view that is philosophical in tone, they do not thereby, nor do I wish to, avoid a personal stance. On the contrary, this piece claims neither the objectivity of a coroner's report, nor the status of social science research. Indeed, I admit to a growing and deep pessimism.

So let us proceed to the question, have Mexican American world view assumptions served them well in the quest for liberation? The term "liberation" has come to mean so many things in the cause of diverse interests that it begs for a precision that delineates significant differences. If by "liberation" one means "the act of freeing from control or domination by a foreign power, or the state of being freed from such power," a most legitimate definition by the way, then what is the foreign power oppressing Mexican Americans? In fact, the term has come to denote almost every form of relief from almost every social ill and for almost every human want. It has become a charismatic term, to use Weaver's phrase. Charismatic terms, according to Weaver, are terms of considerable potency. "Their meaning seem inexplicable unless we accept the hypothesis

that their content proceeds out of a popular will that they shall mean something."[38] They appear to have broken loose from any specific referents, and function by convention, i.e., by common consent or by "charisma."

Given the vagueness of the term "liberation" and the dismal state of cultural values, the quest for liberation has been equated with demands for change in almost every field of human endeavor. No doubt many sought after changes were linked to rising expectations of "the good life," or of more of the same: the same rights, the same opportunities, the same benefits, or the same pleasures. It is evident that for many Mexican Americans non-egoistic, and even universalizable principles for the good of all alike, underlied many of their meanings and requests for change. But have Mexican Americans thereby conflated equality to sameness, and linked liberation with a lust for ethnic conformity?

For example, for "Corky" Gonzales and many of his contemporaries liberation meant, among other things, nationalism, or rather a new sense of nationalism. This nationalism was perceived as the potential common ground that would unify the diverse and divergent ideologies of Mexican Americans. Nationalism, identified as "the common denominator," was to be used as a tool to establish and forge a new Mexican American consciousness: Aztlán.

> "We have to understand that liberation comes from self-determination, and to start to use the tools of nationalism to win over our barrio brothers . . . . We have to win these brothers over, and we have to do it by action. Whether it be by police brutality, the educational system, whether it be against oppression of any kind, you create an action, you create a blow-out, and you see how fast those kids get politicized . . . . And watch how fast they learn to identify with ourselves, and to understand that we need to create a nation."[39]

It is apparent that Mr. Gonzales banked too heavily and with very little collateral on assumptions that did not and have not carried over into the program he envisioned. As such, his thought reflected a utopianism based more on hope that reality, fiction rather than facts. No doubt others have been guilty of the same. In any event the vision of "Corky" Gonzales is now the stuff of faded dreams.

> Ernesto Galarza was perhaps closer to the truth when he observed that, "Mexicans must take care that theirs does not become a culture of protest only. As such it is unified from without; its strategies must depend on alien decisions; it is constantly forced to be where the reaction and not the action is; its anger is constantly liable to turn inward under frustration; it forgets that some protests can be cooled into grievances and these into settlements, while others should not be quieted by anything less than basic transformations."[40]

But protest has lost its appeal for large numbers of Mexican Americans. And if protest formed an essential ingredient of the Chicano Movement, then we may with some truth assert that it has breathed its last call to protest. Rest in peace?

No doubt in the minds of perhaps a substantial number of Mexican Americans, mostly writers and intellectuals, the Chicano Movement did not die; it merely shifted gears. Is not the wealth of Chicano literature proof of the survival of the Movement, proof that the quest for liberation continues?

The answer is, "very probably not!" For the people of this nation have been shifting gears also, leaving many a writer and thinker wondering. I am certainly not the first to observe that this shift has amounted to a radical relativism, and an accompanying loss of meaning.

"Such a loss of meaning is commonplace both in contemporary literature and in existentialist philosophy. The novels and plays of Jean-Paul Sartre portray man's futile attempt to create meaning for himself. In his play No Exit two women and a man are confined to a room devoid of windows on the larger world and from which they cannot escape. For all their efforts to create a life of sorts together, they succeed only in alienating themselves from each other: it is hell, and 'hell is other people'; each of us ultimately stands alone without understanding or love or anything to make life meaningful and whole."[41]

The loss of meaning of the container has had consequences for the contained, Mexican Americans, as well.

Of course, the themes of alienation, hopelessness, and loss of meaning had permeated Chicano literature as well. Villarreal's Pocho, Barrio's The Plum Plum Pickers, or Vasquez' Chicano illustrate the claim. These authors astonish the reader with scene after scene of a fragmented legacy that traces its roots to the desperate times depicted in Azuela's novels of the revolution, in particular, his Los de Abajo. Add to this the problems of racism and urban decay which further fragment our existence so that we need, as perhaps never before, some way of seeing things as a whole.

But man has cut himself off from moral absolutes--presumably the ultimate liberation. Notwithstanding the contradiction, he seeks for the one thing that will give meaning to the many, and encounters constant failure in a sea of chance with every new venture or project. Work, family, career, church, cultural activities, marriage and children "pull him in a maze of conflicting directions without any unifying values of purpose to help him select priorities, guide each part, and unify the whole."[42]

Other consequences follow.

> "He is like a man adrift in a boat without rudder or compass, on an ocean that has no bounds. It makes no eventual difference what he does or which way he rows. But row he must, if life is to be kept together for the unpredictably little while that it lasts."[43]

Emotional and physical breakdown seem inevitable, although many a detour leads to a different bondage--that of drugs, from which "liberation," I am told, comes hard.

And of course, because biblical Christianity has rarely been correctly understood by "modern" man, it has more or less been routinely ignored. Underlying Sartre's pessimism, for example, is an outright denial of the existence of God, which if not true of Chicano writers in general, cannot be inferred unambiguously from their writings. If there is a solid belief in God underlying Chicano ideologies, it appears to be a belief that does not carry over very successfully from the religious to social and political spheres.

Let me speak plainly. All of this is by way of saying that modern man has junked the religious view of life--to his grief and doom, I believe. As one theologian put it, we live in a post-christian world wherein (it is falsely claimed) there is no absolute moral law, no eternal purpose, no rational universe, no unchanging human self. Thus, when all eternal truth is denied, the future lies open to any possibility whatsoever. As Dostoyevsky said, "if God is dead then anything is possible." And finally, with the Marquis de Sade, "Whatever is, is right!"

Given these premises one could argue that if racism <u>is</u>, it is right; if oppression <u>is</u>, it is right. In a world in which there is no absolute standard by which to assess action, purpose, or motive, right and wrong, true

and false, or just and unjust become entirely relative and sustained on the basis of power by those who wield it most efficiently. On this view, what is right, true, or just is what is right, true, or just for those in power. Thus, one comes face to face with an old philosophy of life: might makes right and true and just and whatever else someone may choose to add to the list.

It was not thus at the beginning, neither for the Chicano Movement, and certainly not for the Nation. Once upon a time, the choice men and women faced in their quest for liberation was measured by a by no means trivial commitment to standards that determined the choice of life or death itself.

> "Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it Almighty God! I know not what others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"[44]

Let me close with these last observations.

The question Mexican Americans should face squarely is one that concerns the meaning of freedom. Quite simply, it is necessary to ask first, and specifically, freedom from what? At the same time, one must also ask, freedom to what? What does this freedom point to? Rigorous, realistic analyses of these questions and answers will display the value and cost of the sought after freedom. We need only read Solzhenitsyn to remind ourselves that freedom does not come free; neither does it exist in a vacuum. Ultimately, the quest for true liberation is inextricably bound to the quest for the origin and end of all value. Nothing short of this will succeed. The alternative is to accept the morally bankrupt system of value called relativism, from which I suspect that is no true liberation, only degrees of oppression.

NOTES

1. Patrick Romanell. MAKING OF THE MEXICAN MIND (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 13.
2. Proverbs 23:7
3. Francis A. Schaeffer, HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE? (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Ravell Company, 1976), p. 19.
4. John Warwick Montgomery. THE SUICIDE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1976), p. 25.
5. _____. THE SHAPING OF AMERICA (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1976), p. 25.
6. Ibid., p. 26.
7. Ibid.
8. Octavio Paz. THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE: LIFE AND THOUGHT IN MEXICO, trans. by Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 29.
9. Ibid., pp. 13-15.
10. Ibid., p 14.
11. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
12. Ibid., p. 31.
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